HARAMBEE NEWS

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UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN BLACK AMERICA

In spite of the social gains black Americans forged out of the struggles of the civil rights era, blacks are still an oppressed and super-exploited people. Unemployment at an official 14.5% among blacks is currently more than twice as high as it is among whites. City governments all across America still systematically allocate more money for social services in the white community than in the black community. Insurance companies continue to charge higher premiums for life, home, and business insurance for blacks than for whites. Banks "red-line" entire sections of America's black communities and thus make any black person living in the red-lined area automatically ineligible for bank loans and assistance; small-scale black businesses in red-lined areas find it extremely difficult to obtain bank loans. Local and national law-enforcement agencies continue to harass, unlawfully jail, brutalize, and murder black social activists and try to undermine viable black organizations that serve as virtually the only honest and meaningful representation black people have.

In virtually all of America's ghettos, the most lucrative businesses and enterprises are owned by people who live and spend most of their money outside of those ghettos. What this means is that the money black people earn is, one way or the other, constantly being drained out of the black community by businessmen who do not contribute anything to the real needs and interests of that community from which they take. And the above-mentioned insurance company and bank practices serve to maintain this vicious status quo.

The gains we have made in the past decade have been no more than token gains, insofar as the majority of black people are concerned. I say this because the basic economic, social, and political reality for black people has not been meaningfully altered. In the absence of any permanent political party which truly represents the interests and aspirations of black people, the right to vote loses much if not all of its significance. In the absence of teachers who fully understand the special problems black youth have to live with daily, the right of blacks to go to school alongside whites is a frail and insignificant circumstance. And in the absence of adequate wages, geared to inflation, that would give black workers an appreciable degree of social mobility, black people's right to move into middle-class white neighborhoods is nothing more than a meaningless "ideal."

We are no longer ostensibly sold on the block. But I am convinced that America, as presently constituted, will never either eradicate or seriously attempt to eradicate the effects of past and present imustices against black Americans. The nature of American social organization is capitalist. As a capitalist nation, America is forced to give more attention to the property rights of corporations than to human rights. If this is not true, then someone please tell me how this nation manages to afford to spend billions of dollars propping up dictatorships in foreign countries, losing billions of dollars to cost over-runs in the construction of superfluous military hardware, etc., but cannot seem to find the money to rebuild the delapidated housing in America's poor communities, to fund innovative educational projects to improve the lot of poor children and adults, to rid communities of rat infestation, to do all the other things necessary to make something more of the American dream than the sadistic hoax that it is at present for so many of us. We have just begun a new decade. And it is my sincere hope that we can make more of this decade than we did with the last one.

-Thawabu, Chairman

BLACK ENGLISH

(Considerable discussion has been generated by the July 12, 1979 decision by U.S. District Judge Charles Joiner which ordered the Ann Arbor school board to develop a plan by which Black school children would be effectively taught to read standard(white) English. The decision suggested that the development of this plan provide for the teaching of Black English to teachers so that they could be capable of assisting their students in the "language switching" process. In the December/January issue of Black Collegian, Black educator, Geneva Smitherman, is interviewed on the question of Black English. The following is an excerpt from that interview.)

"Black English is historically associated with race. However much I scientifically note its African origins, the fact of the matter is that if Black people had been totally integrated into American life, I mean everywhere, in churches, schools, had intermarried, if we had been totally integrated we would not have Black culture or Black English. It's due to our exclusion. We have maintained a system that has worked for us, that has helped us to survive. We built this system with the rudiments of what we brought here, which was our African culture and linguistic background. Now the school system has got to deal with a situation that really is part of the whole fabric of American life. They are now mandated by the federal government to acknowledge that our kids' language is legitimate, that standard English is a barrier in the educational process, and that they have to take appropriate action to overcome those barriers. Appropriate action involves recognizing that what the child has is legitimate. If you reject that you can't do any kind of teaching...."

The HARAMBEE NEWS is a publication of the Harambee Afro-Cultural Organization--P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, Neb.; 68502.

DIRECTOR OF CORRECTIONS QUESTIONED ON RACIAL COMPOSITION OF STAFF

Recently the Harambee News reported that the Harambee Afro-Cultural Organization was initiating an effort to get an affirmative action plan instituted at this penitentiary. Since then, we have retained the aid of the Deputy State Ombudsman for Corrections. He has sent Jerry Bolin, Director of Corrections, an extensive list of questions dealing with the number of non-whites employed by the Corrections Department, their positions, the racial composition of the Corrections population, etc. The Deputy Ombudsman, Hasan Muhammad, has received responses to these questions and forwarded the information to us. As the following data indicates, the need for the establishment of an affirmative action plan for the Dept. of Corrections is a serious one.

- -Blacks constitute 36% of the population of the Pen Unit of the Nebraska Penal & Correctional Complex; while there are but two Blacks employed as guards out of the total number of 212 guards employed at the Pen Unit.

- -Of the 65 persons employed by the Dept. of Correctional Services as medical personel, only 3 are Black.

- -While 37 of the total of 135 prisoners working in Correctional Industries at the Pen Unit are Black, there are no Black work supervisors.

It is the feeling of a substantial number of non-white prisoners that the scarcity of non-white Correctional employees serves to minimize an opportunity for them to receive adequate understanding of their problems and a "fair shake" overall. The Harambee News will keep you abreast of other developments as they occur.

We welcome your contributions to this newsletter, whether they be in the form of money or writing. Contributions of money may be sent to HARAMBEE AFRO-CULTURAL ORG. Writings c/o editor, David L. Rice.

TUNING IN

Despite the overall absence of quality programming on the radio, there are some interesting programs:

-"Prisoners' Forum" on KZUM(89.5 fm) in Lincoln. This program, hosted by Al Keen and Lonnie Kocontes, focuses on issues related to prisoners' rights, developments in the criminal "justice" field, etc. "Prisoners' Forum" airs on Mondays from 6:30-7:30 p.m.

-"Minority Reflections" airs on Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to noon and Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. This program is hosted by Mary Weathers and can be heard on KVNO, 90.7 on the fm side. It generally has an interview format in which featured guests are questioned about issues of importance to Blacks, Native Americans, or Chicanos.

"JOINT" CONFERENCE WRITING CONTESTS

"Joint" Conference will sponsor several writing contests during 1979-80. Entries must be marked for contest 1, 2,or 3. All winning entries will be published in future issues of "Joint" Conference. Contests open to any person incarcerated in a U.S.federal or state prison or jail. Deadline is March 31, 1980.

-Contest #1: short-short story not over 1,500 words. Prize-$50.00

Contest #2: short story up to 4,000 words by a previously unpublished writer. 1st. prize-$100 2nd. prize-$50

Contest #3: poetry(not under 15 lines) 1st. prize-$100 2nd. prize-$50

Mail entries to: King Publications
P.O. Box 19332
Washington, D.C.
20036

KEEPING UP

The following is a list of suggested periodicals for keeping up with what's coming up and/or going down.

Black Scholar
P.O. Box 908
Sausalito, Calif.
94965

Changes
17300 Woodward Ave.
Detroit, Mich.
48203

Black Collegian
1240 So. Broad St.
New Orleans, La.
70125

Kemet
P.O. Box 24104
Oakland, Calif.
94523

WHY WE EXIST

When one is imprisoned, he or she may mentally cut him or herself off from the goings on outside the prison and may narrow his or her view so that only the self can be seen. We have just left what many people are referring to as the "me generation" in which many of us put out of our minds, or pretended to, thoughts related to the collective struggle of our people. If you who are called "free people" have isolated yourselves, imagine the absurdity of prisoners adding to their already physical isolation from the outside world by cutting themselves off mentally from that world and this one as well.

The Harambee Afro-Cultural Organization exists as a reminder to displaced African Brothers here that we have a common heritage, a common history, and a common cause. We exist to function as a vehicle by which we may learn more about the self of the utmost importance, the collective self. You Brothers and Sisters on the outside may help us in this process by sharing yourselves with us at our Monday mtgs. To arrange a visit, contact Scott Marshall here at the pen.

Mashairi funguwani/Poets: open the riddle

ALONENESS
(Looking For An Apology)

solitary respiration solidifies
the resounding pulsebeats,
and aloneness contributes to
a callous entity.
my silent song for sensation
engenders death-house poetry, sometimes.
These winds of thought: poetry
or madness(and not the insane brand)
is not meant to be a crutch just
literary fortitude among the shackled folk;
secured in this concentration camp:
certain questions - my refuge.
I shall find my antithesis,
uproot my lost, disconcerted consciousness
and stare at the cretin who bypassed me
with today's nail(and yesterday's,
yestermonth's, and yesteryear's).
Silence, solitude, and desolation
dissects this introspection,
and rancor battles serenity but
I can eradicate my contrite incense
because you forgot to
honor your myriad of
commitments.....
Those times.

-H. "Wili" Otey

(This poem is part of a collection of poems, entitled "Quietus: Perspective In A Condemnatory State," by Wili Otey, a prisoner on death row at the Nebraska State Pen. He is looking for a publisher.)

AND WE CALL THIS "GETTING OVER"

in the pit
the bloody stumps spew their awful fluid
toes shamelessly squiggle on a bloody floor
as another among us
attempts in vain
to make it to the brim
and indeed make claim
to humanity
but we go crazy
as her hand grasps for the top
and we scramble for the wall
demanding she stop
and tearing at her fiercely when she persists
screaming and cursing
pounding at her with our fists
to bring her back down
to rejoin the gore among us

if misery loves company
imagine how it freaks off in a crowd
sparing no one
betraying everyone with its kiss
and we trust only in our suspicions
and feed this bile to our young
as if it were tradition
rather than only one
of a myriad of present conditions
and here in the deep
there is no sleep
by which the light of reality might fade
or be blocked out
for what we might have known as windows
we bricked up
with the rectangles of destitution
their cubistic hardness we cemented together
with the mortar of hopelessness
and are we not like dogs in a pit
tearing at each others' flanks
unable to break the ranks
of individualism
a bone once alien to us
but which we now chew vigorously
and we play all captains on one boat
as this bone splinters and gags us
as it goes down the throat

clouds cover our days
shrouding the sun
dulling its rays
a fitting climate for us
as we play heel
sit
roll over
and stay
while the master barks out his orders
and we whine and yelp
wagging our tails
used now to doing things his way.

-David L. Rice